

# Concurrent Disorders



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# What are Concurrent Disorders?

A Concurrent Disorder is having a psychological disorder in combination with a substance use problem, such as, alcohol or marijuana abuse. An example is a person with Depression who also abuses heroin. There is a wide variety of psychiatric and substance use disorders, therefore people experience Concurrent Disorders in many different ways. Sometimes the terms co-occurring disorder, dual-diagnoses, or co-morbidity are also used in place of Concurrent Disorder.

## What are the Features of Substance Abuse?

- Failing to concentrate or focus on responsibilities at work, school, or home.
- Using substances in physically dangerous situations (e.g. while driving or operating a machine)
- Continued substance use despite relationship problems

## What are the Features of Substance Dependence?

- Needing to increase the amount of the substance used to get the same level of intoxication or 'high' that is desired
- Experiencing physical and/or emotional symptoms when the substance use is reduced or stopped.
- Spending a lot of time trying to get the substance
- Sacrificing important social, work, or recreational activities in order to use the substance.

## Facts about Concurrent Disorders:

- It has been found that about 50% of adolescents in the United States with a substance abuse problem also have a concurrent psychological disorder.
- Adolescents with alcohol dependence have been found to be twice as likely to develop Depression than those without alcohol dependence.
- Research has found that people with a cannabis use disorder are 4.5 times more likely to develop Depression than people without a cannabis use disorder.
- It has been found that about 25% of people who have had an anxiety disorder in their lifetime will also have a substance use disorder in their lifetime.
- Canadian adolescents (12-16 years old) with a mental disorder are more likely to use substances, especially females.
- In the United States, youth ages 15-24 are the age group most likely to have a Concurrent Disorder.

## What Causes Concurrent Disorders?

- There are many different possible causes of Concurrent Disorders:
- A person living with a psychological disorder may develop a substance use problem if they begin to use substances to feel better, forget their problems or cope with the symptoms of their mental illness. For example, a person with Social Anxiety Disorder may use alcohol or other substances

to relax in social settings, and cannabis use in people with Schizophrenia has been explained as a possible form of self medication to reduce symptoms.

- There may be similar biological factors (e.g. genetic vulnerability, family history) or life events (e.g. trauma) that make a person vulnerable to both a psychological and substance problem.
- The effects of substance use may mimic symptoms of a mental health problem including Depression and Anxiety.
- A person may develop a mental health problem due to the indirect effects of substance use such as changes in interpersonal relationships.
- Long-term use of a substance may cause physiological changes in the body, which may result in the development of a psychological disorder. For example research has found that adolescents who are heavy cannabis users have an increased risk in developing Schizophrenia compared with adolescents who do not use cannabis.

## How are Concurrent Disorders Treated?

Some people find treatment to be most successful when their substance problem is treated at the same time as their psychological problem. This is referred to as integrated treatment and it involves health care agencies connecting and coordinating care for the person.

Treatment may include the following:

Psychosocial:

- Individual or group psychotherapy
- Family therapy
- Peer support

Medications for substance abuse:

- Aversive medications that make substance use unpleasant
- Medications that relieve cravings
- Substitution medications that prevent or reduce intoxication and/or withdrawal symptoms

Medications for mental illness:

- Anti-anxiety medications
- Mood stabilizers
- Antidepressants medications
- Antipsychotic medications